"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

## What the Rural Church Movement Means to Me*

By Members of the Ohio Christian Rural Fellowship
with a Meditation by Philip H. Steinmetz

THE MESSAGE OF THE RURAL CHURCH:
By Philip Humason Steinmetz -

Whether city, suburban or rural the Christian Church has but one message and function: to proclaim what God has done in Christ and to provide in a present fellowship an experience of that full membership in the family of God which is open to every woul humble enough to accept without earning it.

The rural church has an advantage over the large city and suburban church in proclaiming the message and having the experience because its size is within the capacity of human comprehension. Limited in equipment and free from crowds, the rural church members can keep close contact with our ever-present God. They can see the sky without smog and hear the Bible without embellishments.

And the rural church is in a community which can be known and understood. The effect of a few individuals with concern and vision can be seen in a small town whereas it is often lost in the city. Even the attempt to understand is often abandoned by city people because the maze is too vast. But where human needs are still individual and evident, Christian neighborliness operates more freely.

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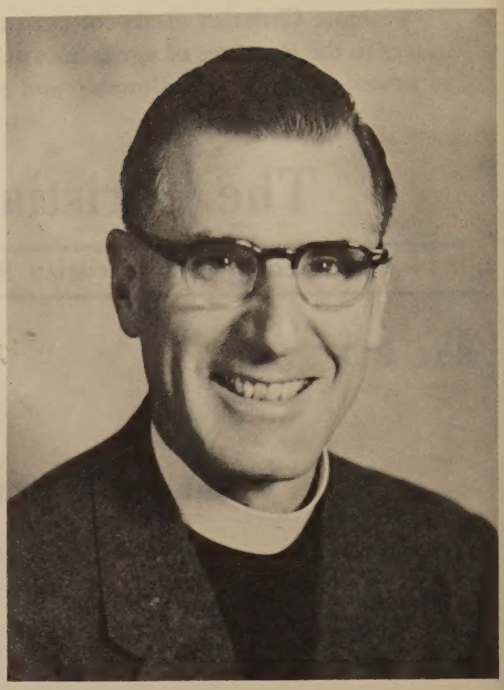
Series of studied statements given at the Ohio Christian Rural Fellowship Annual Meeting held at Columbus on January 30, 1957.

Mr. Steinmetz formerly served the St. John's Episcopal Church and the Congregational Church in Ashfield, Mass., a community of 1,000 souls. He is now Associate to the General Secretary of the Massachusetts Council of Churches.

I. W. M.



Still the rural church can get caught in the pettiness of personal prejudice and the rut of reasonless repetition unless it is rooted in real reverence and responds to the movements of the Spirit. Often a close and saving contact with the living Christ comes in the smaller church where the congregation rather than the choir carries the service. But even here it can be lost unless the individual Christians keep laying open before God the very springs of their lives and allow nothing to claim greater devotion than His service.

As you look at your church and let something of its appearance before God get through into your mind, thank Him for His presence and power and put yourself in line for the flowing of His energy moving you in His service. However sinful you are you may be the means of His love reaching someone who has yet to know the joy of accepting Him and whatever church has you as a member may become more buoyantly joyful as you and others recognize in each other the saving power of God at work in this world which Christ has redeemed.

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PROMOTES CHRISTIAN YOUTH:
Mrs. Ada M. Smith, Presbyterian Layman -

My work in the Rural Church Movement has broadened my understanding and helped me to see the likenesses and to minimize the differences in our Protestant denominational beliefs. I pray it may help my Christian growth.

But most impressive is the work being done by a fine group of ministers, largely young men, who choose to serve in the rural areas, and to do so with much joy, eagerness and vigor - though many times it is at the cost of great material sacrifice for their families.

HOPE FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD:
R. Bruce Tom, Lecturer, Ohio State Grange -

The Rural Church Movement means to me, if I do my part, the opportunity and responsibility:- to reach for the best in life; for unity in action on programs that really matter; to use my resources, physical, mental, economic, social and spiritual for the benefit of all; to promote positive attitudes in thinking and doing; to develop love and loyalty for a cause bigger than self; to make the teachings of Christ a part of everyday living; to scale the Heights of Christian character and satisfaction in living; to inspire you and me to greater achievements; to help each one of us in rediscovering life potentials to the fullest; to create a Christian community with a concern for all mankind; to help in bringing to fruition the hopes of all for a peaceful world.

A CHALLENGE THAT MAKES LIFE REAL:
Rev. John H. Elwood, Methodist Minister -

After answering the call to be a minister of Jesus Christ, I entered College and later a Theological School to prepare for the Christian ministry. During that time I kept looking for a challenge, one that would make Christ real in the lives of people and bring meaning to my ministry. This I found in the Rural Church Movement.

I have seen where too many rural people and small churches have been ignored and left unserved while too many trained men spent their time debating theology instead of redeeming mankind. The Rural Church Movement has taken Christ into everyday life in the countryside. We must remember that all of life is sacred and, therefore, the church should be interested in all of mankind's experience.

The Rural Church Movement has brought together those who have received this challenge in a very wholesome and enriching fellowship. This fellowship has had much influence on my life and ministry. It has given strength, courage, and hope when the going got tought Every time I leave my local parish to rub shoulders with the great leaders of the Rural Church Movement, I go back home with a new vision.

And, finally, the Rural Church Movement has produced program, philosophy and tools for the rural minister. It does not condemn the small church for its weaknesses, but rather gives help for it to become what it ought to be.

SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT:
Paul A. Getz, Layman; Exec.Secy, Ohio Wool Growers Coop.Assoc.

Agriculture, like any other industry, can only be as strong as its leadership. In our fast industrial expansion, there has been a tendency, especially some years back, for our religious educational and social leadership to give its major emphasis to problems of the urban centers at the expense of the rural areas. This is still too much the case. However, I feel the thinking on the parts of this leadership, in reference to the relative importance of rural problems as compared to urban problems has changed. No longer do we have the feeling there are two completely separate groups - urban and rural, or city and country. The feeling now is general that both groups or both areas are more and more interrelated and dependent upon each other.

Our agricultural and industrial leaders are more and more becoming aware of the importance of the church in the rural

community, its influence upon agriculture and its affect upon the quality of young people the rural areas keep feeding into the cities.

I think the Rural Church Movement has done more than any other force in the last twenty-five years to bring about this enlightenment. With its continued emphasis on a ministry to the whole community, the Rural Church Movement should continue to show a tremendous influence on the character of the total American community of urban and rural people living and working together.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP:
Robert Grieser, Farmer; President of Ohio Assoc. of Soil Conservation Districts -

The church is the home of Christian understanding. Therefore, the movement of such a group is a challenge to every individual and to every family.

As I endeavor to do my part in agriculture as a farmer, I find myself very close to the wonder workings of God's universe. My wife and I and our children find it a privilege to worship in a rural church, also a challenge of stewardship in the keeping of our earthly inheritance. I feel that it is our duty to conserve the soil and water of the earth and to leave it in a better condition for the ones who are to follow. This is our way of sharing the best of what we have during our stay here on earth.

Somehow, each spring as I travel the fields and see the new plant life and the activity of the newborn animals, I feel God has surely blessed us.

The church must move ahead because it is in competition with numerous other activities. It is still the only place where we, as a growing family, can all attend at the same time with the same thought in mind. In today's fast changing way of living we still need the Christian fellowship, love and understanding of the church. This we receive only by worshipping God with our neighbors.

SOIL FOR THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIAN PERSONALITY:
Rev. Russell Hoy, Methodist Minister -

Those of us in the Rural Church Movement believe that within the segment of society we call rural there are inherent and abiding values which must be conserved by all, both rural and urban alike.

We believe that in a world rapidly becoming mechanized and industrialized, we should not forget the organic processes of nature, and should emphasize their influence upon individual and group life.

We believe that within the small community with face to face relationships, common interests and concern for mutual helpfulness, there is found the most fertile soil for the growth of Christian personality.

We believe that farmers, part-time farmers, as well as other rural dwellers, find in the neighborhood and small community, a sense of togetherness and unity, despite their varied interests and occupations.

Into such a rural community the church moves, as a leaven, embodying the redeeming and unifying spirit of Christ, not caring for honor or glory, prestige or power, as long as the kingdom of God is established in the country-side. To me the Rural Church Movement is a fellowship of those concerned and dedicated to the above ideals, ideas, and purposes. I am happy to be a part of that fellowship.

PART OF A WORLD FELLOWSHIP:
Rev. Alva Knoll, Evangelical United Brethren Minister -

In the earlier rural neighborhood people knew each other, helped each other and joined hands to work out common projects together, but with the rush to build industrial cities there has been a growth of selfish individualism. The Rural Church Movement has sought to PRESERVE THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNITY. This has been implemented by mapping, surveying and studying communities and organizing recreational, educational, economic and religious groups to build real community.

From this it followed that Christianity must be manifest in group relations as well as in individual lives. An effort is being made to INTEGRATE THE GROUPS AND AGENCIES WITHIN A COMMUNITY so they may work together for the good of all. Instead of holding aloof from so-called "secular" activities, the church is becoming concerned with every phase of experience, and the agencies that note this concern are themselves becoming concerned with the work of the church.

Finally, a community can no longer live unto itself alone. It is affected by all that happens anywhere in the world. Therefore, the local community should be aware of the world community and develop a concern for and an effective participation in human events outside the local area - it must MATURE INTO A PART OF THE NEW WORLD FELLOWSHIP.

These are goals for any community, rural or otherwise, but in my experience, the Rural Church Movement has had the best raw materials to work with, and has been out in front demonstrating the possibility of reaching the goals.

INSTRUCTION AND INSPIRATION:
Rev. Harold C. Loughead, State Town and Country worker for Ohio Baptist Assoc. -

The Rural Church Movement has done four wonderful things in my life. First, it directed my ministry to rural people. I had been a farm boy, with a Christian experience in a tiny church served as an afternoon appointment of a city pastor. During my junior year in seminary, Dr. Mark Dawber gave me a vision of the kind of church rural people could and should have. I dedicated my life to giving the people a more effective Christian program than I had known.

It also gave me the needed encouragement to keep this vision from fading and the hope that some day it could be achieved. The fellowship, instruction and inspiration of rural church gatherings have sent me home with renewed enthusiasm and determination.

It, too, has given me the inspiration to undertake that pioneering in church methods that is so essential to a vital ministry. People rather than institutions became important. All the needs of all the people of the community must be my concern as a Christian minister. Thus I was helped to see that the unreached, and those usually thought of as the least desirable, because their needs were so great, should have my special attention and effort.

Finally, it has given me one of the most satisfying ministries I could possibly have rendered for my Lord. Yes, I thank God for the Rural Church Movement that has guided, encouraged and inspired me in my joyous ministry to rural people.

STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES:
Rev. Donald K. McGarrah, Presbyterian Minister -

Born in the heart of New York City, and having spent childhood years in St. Louis and Chicago, we have seen fit to accept calls to the town and country ministry. We have had happy experiences in city churches, but we prefer rural work and are now in our sixth year in a two-church field, the third yoked field served in our labors. The rural church has won a deep place in our hearts and calls us to a continuing loyalty.

The rural field offers a chance for satisfying fellowship both in a closeness to God amidst natural beauty and living things, in a daily walk with humble neighborly people and in its stimulating outdoor activity productive of health and happiness. We have, moreover, found a progressive small community to be a better place for raising children.

Another great attraction to the town and country church is its harvest potential in the number of youth available and in attendance at church activities. Here are a group one can really help mold for capable leadership or worthy labor whether they remain locally or go forth to bless another locality.

As in every place where there are people, the rural field calls for a full ministry to every changing age group and individual need. In the small community the pastor and church must often assume continuing leadership as well as instigating service activities which might be taken care of by other organizations in a larger community.

PURPOSE AND DIRECTION FOR LIFE:
John Mount, Asst. Dean and Secy, College of Agriculture,
Ohio State University -

Any individual, community, state or country must have established principles which give purpose and direction, if there is to be growth, progress and life everlasting.

The Rural Church Movement has provided these principles which have given a central purpose and unifying direction to the life of our rural communities, our rural organizations, our families and to our rural leadership.

May I, if you please, suggest three principles which I believe, have been exemplified through the lives of the people who have served in the Rural Church Movement. They are, first, a dedication to serve the kingdom of God. Our rural churches have served well and have provided a corps of dedicated men and women - leaders who have the philosophy of service before self, people who have accepted the challenge of God's trust in mankind; secondly, an unfailing faith in God and fellowman. Rural people trust and have faith in one another. Our rural organizations such as the Farm Bureau, Grange, Cooperatives, and Youth Groups, and the International Farm Youth Exchange Program, have been built on a foundation of faith and trust; - thirdly, a willingness to make commitments and accept responsibilities. The willingness to stand up and account for what is right has been demonstrated by rural church leaders many times.

RENEWING VISION:
J. P. Schmidt, Rural Sociologist, Ohio State Extension Service
in India -

What the rural church movement has meant to me is hard to put into a simple statement. Here are some of the facts, sentiments, and satisfactions. Forty years ago this summer I surveyed 106 Ohio rural churches. Warren H. Wilson preceded me by five years. Then there was Ralph Felton, also "6000 Country Churches" 1916.

I do not know just when my interest began, but all this time the rural church movement has given direction to my career. The church

has been a prime implement for improving rural life.

This has been a team opportunity to work with people who believe in rural life - now and in the future. Here is the thrill and satisfaction of planning to improve conditions rather than accept conditions as fate. (This prevailing passive religion is the bane of India. This pitiful apathy must be overcome.)

Achieving harmony among rural agencies - as in Ohio is perhaps the most abiding joy of all my efforts.

Renewing vision constantly because of contacts with so many faithful, progressive leaders has kept me alive, literally and figuratively.

Helping others through an organized plan in Ohio and seeing results, inspired me to become a partner in "Operation India". Our finest success comes when all together we work as a team toward our rural life objectives. Throughout my rural church work I have felt that I was part of a movement deeply significant. This gives meaning to life. It happens that the extension service seemed to offer me a better organized plan. The OCRF is now achieving this efficiency of coordinated effort.

In India, my very life depends upon this larger "Rural Church Movement". The doctors at this post are missionaries. Mrs. Schmidt and I and other staff members have really needed them.

Thank God for the Rural Church Movement.

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